

NATURE AND WOMEN- ECO-FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Women play vital role in the management of natural sources, including soil, water, forests and energy, and often have profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them. Women have different relationship with environment, including different needs, responsibilities and knowledge about natural resources. But women are affected directly by environmental degradation, deforestation, pollution and over population, they become more concerned about environmental problems. Several movements followed by women are Chipko Movement, Green belt Movement, Navdanya Movement and Kenya Land take over. Vandana shiva, Wangari Maathai, Maria Cherkasova and Rachel Carson are famous personalities all over the world. Even in Tamil Nadu, women are saving the environment in and around the society. Eco-Feminism, refers to women's and feministic perspectives on the environment, where the domination and exploitation of women of poorly resourced people and of nature, is at the heart of the eco-feminist movement. In this paper we have discussed about, how the women serve her role to protect our planet.

KEYWORDS: Women, Protection, Environment, Movement, Conservation, Ecology & Feminists, Ecosystem

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INTRODUCTION

It's time to act! Our World is increasingly getting hotter creating devastating effects to the ecosystem. For too long we have forgotten the fact that, the earth is a place where life is abundant due to its ecological balance. Ecofeminism says that, women are closer to nature than men. Women are more nurturing and caring, towards environment. An ecofeminist believes in a direct connection between oppression of nature and the subordination of women. The term Eco feminism was coined by French Feminist Francoise D Eaubonne in 1974. She tried to describe about the male domination. Eco-feminism is the social movement that regards the oppression on women and nature, which are interconnected. In 20th century, women struggled to protect wildlife, food, air and water. This paper discusses about, the major environmental movements like Chipko movement, Green Belt movement, Navadanya and Kenya land take over, focussing on the concept and role of eco feminism in and around India.

NATURE AND WOMEN

Man took one million years to destroy the healthy environment, but nature had taken 600 million years to develop the biosphere. On earth surface, both in water as well as on land, these changes result in impoverishment of biological systems and the degeneration of biodiversity. In the atmosphere, rising concentration of carbon dioxide causes global warming, while pollution of stratosphere has been eating away the vital zone shield. These changes are expected to make human life more and more miserable in times to come. Women have a major role to play in saving environment. Women should create awareness to the unknown people to be aware, recognise and

control the environment problems in their future life.

ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS INITIATED BY WOMEN

We cannot expect people to act in appropriate way without the awareness of the problems, its causes, the impact on our daily life and the long range consequences. A little effort, a little care exercised by each individual in the society could eliminate the entire problem. The movements are as follows:

Chipko Movement

One of the first environmentalist's movement which were inspired by women, the Chipko Movement. The word came from a Hindi word meaning "to stick". The king ordered some workers to cut the trees, but Amrita Devi and her 84 villagers had taken risk to protect the trees in the forest, from being felled. In Reni village, women began to organize themselves under several groups, and started threatening the tree cutters. In October 1971, the workers held a demonstration in Gopeshwar, to protest the policies of the forest department. In late 1972, they conducted rallies and marches. The forest department contracted the cutting of 300 trees, to Simon Company, which a sporting goods manufacturer in Allahabad, to make tennis rackets. In March 1973, the lumberman arrived at Gopeshwar, they were confronted at the village Mandal, where about hundred villagers and workers were beating drums and shouting slogans. The contractors were cancelled and the sangam decided to resort to tree-hugging, or Chipko, as a means of non-violent protest.

The villagers decided to protest against the actions of the government, by hugging the trees. On March 25, 1974, the lumbermen were to cut the trees and Gaura Devi, the head of the village Mahila Mangal Dal, at Reni village, led 27 village women to that site and confronted the loggers. But the loggers shouted and threatened with guns, when suddenly the women started hugging the trees, it went on till late hours; the women were all night guarding the trees from the cutters. The cutters and the leaders were returned, the movement spread over the other villages and more people joined in this movement.

The news reached the state capital, where the Chief Minister Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna arranged a committee to look after the news, which eventually ruled the favour of the villagers. This became the turning point in the history of eco-development struggles in that region and around the world. The leaders named their activities as, Chipko Movement. The people spreaded the movement to other districts as well. The movement achieved victory, when the government issued a ban on felling the trees in Himalayan regions for 15 years in 1980, by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, until the green cover was fully restored.

Green Belt Movement

One of the biggest movement in the women and environment's history, Green Belt Movement. In Kenya, Wangari Maathai started the organization in 1977. The starting ceremony was very simple, a few women planted several trees in Maathai's backyard.

This movement made rural women to plant trees, eradicate deforestation, and restore fuel and to stop soil erosion. When the movement started, over 51 million trees were planted and 30,000 women were trained in forest, to preserve the land. In Kenya, some groups were motivated to prevent environmental destructions and restore the damaged ones. The main work for this movement was reduction of poverty and conservation of environment.

Wangari Maathai was the first African woman to win the Nobel Prize, for that movement in the year 2004. She had published the book named, *The Green Belt Movement*. It helped to plant trees, water harvesting, climate change and providing education to change the current system. The rural people challenged to reduce green house gas emissions. This organisation had created 3000 part-time jobs to the people in Kenya.

Navadanya Movement

Navadanya means Nine Seeds that represent India's collective source of food security. The movement fed the farmers, to grow the plants, without using any chemicals. It had reached many farmers and 65 seed banks have been created in India. The movement was a non-governmental organisation, which promotes organic farming, biodiversity conservation and the rights of farmers of seed saving. Vandhana Shiva was the founder, who began it in 1984; she provided direction and support to protect the biosphere.

Kenyan Land Takeover

In Kenya, women were under the hands of their husband and the government, because they had to cultivate coffee plant for foreign profit in 1980s. They fought against the government, to resend the land for their own use. Then they ended the protests, before the national election.

According to the World Bank, women make up 80 percent of Kenya's farmers. Despite their majority, they still have many challenges to overcome, like gaining ownership of the land they work in. A small landholder female farmer Linda Okal working in a maize field in the district of Embu, Kenya done this by using her hand and a hoe. She had taken care of a hectare and a quarter of land, and also cows, coffee, bananas, and beans. The most important crop in the half hectare was maize that she grows every season. Nowadays, more than 80 percent of Kenya's farms were run by women.

WOMEN ENVIRONMENTALISTS

Maria Cherkasova

Maria Cherkasova was a Russian journalist, ecologist, and director of the Centre for Independent Ecological Programmers (CIEP). She was famous because of coordinating a 4 year campaign, to stop the construction of hydro-electric dam on the Katun River. After Cherkasova's involvement in the student movement on environmental protection in the 1960s, she began to work for the Red Data Book, for the Department of Environmental Protection Institute. She researched and preserved rare species until she became the editor of USSR Red Data Book.

Maria was the co-founder of the Socio-Ecological union, which had become the largest ecological NGO in the former Soviet Union. In 1990, she became the director of CIEP, which arranges and drives activities in an extensive range of ecologically related areas, on both domestic and international fronts. Cherkasova recently had shifted her focus on children rights protection, to live in a healthy environment and speaks for both inside and outside Russia.

Rachel Carson

Rachel Carson was one of the outstanding environmentalists. She was An American scientist, writer and ecologist. She was inspired by her biology teacher so she had chosen her major from English to biology. She was well interested and focused on the sea when she works at Marine Biological Laboratories in Massachusetts. The publication of her first book, *Under the Sea-Wind: a Naturalists' Picture of Ocean Life*, was in 1941. She became the Chief Editor of, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in 1949. Her second book was *The Sea around Us*, had won the National Book Award.

After Rachel Carson's retirement from FWS, she had become a full time writer. Her last book was about the sea, *The Edge of the Sea*; this work focussed about the effects of chemicals and pesticides on the environment. When she has written her book about environment, *Silent Spring*, about what man has done to the nature and eventually to him, and started a modern environmental movement. Carson believed that, human and nature are mutually dependent on each other. She argued that, industrial activities such as pesticides use can damage the earth ecosystem and will have far-reaching ecological consequences such as future human health problems. Today, scientific studies have demonstrated these consequences.

Elaine Enarson

Elaine Enarson was a writer, scholar and educator on women in disasters. From the United States and based in Evergreen, Colorado, she was the founding member of the gender and disaster network, a lead developer of a social vulnerability course for the Federal Emergency Management Agency of her country and a principal investigator on a vulnerability project in the Caribbean.

Nandita Krishna

Nandita Krishna was a historian, environmentalist and a writer in Chennai. She was a professor and a research guide for the Ph.D programme of the University of Madras. In 1981, she started nature education programmes for teachers and students in the C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation. In the same year, she became the Chairperson for Tamilnadu of WWF India, she held this position till 1996. She has been the member of the Senate of the University of Madras, Central Zoo Authority, National Wildlife Board, National Environmental Council, Govt of India, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education and the Committee for Environmental Orientation to School Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development. Her programmes were vermi-composting, herbal gardens, collection and maintenance of seed banks through eco-friendly products.

Krishnammal Jagannathan

Krishnammal Jagannadham was a social worker from Tamil Nadu. She worked for Dalits improvement. She was against the industries that were polluting the ground water. She was Gandhian activists. She received several awards for her work.

During 1992, she worked for landless unemployed people, sent from the industries. The industries had taken the cultivable land for their prawn company and also made the land salty and polluted ground water. They had struggled for drinking water. Then they sold out the lands and moved to the city and filled the urban slums.

The Jagannathans organised the LAFTI village movement to create awareness on opposing the prawn farms. They filed a petition in Supreme Court to find a solution for this problem. The report mentioned all prawn farms were banned within 500 meters from coast. The Supreme Court ordered a rule against prawn farms should not work in cultivable lands. But it still not resolved and struggling towards eco-friendly communities.

Ms. Ramathal

Women have a major role to play in environment protection, said M. Ramathal, Chairperson of state Women's Commission, at Tiruvarur. Women could plant a sapling in their house and use water efficiently. Thus they could contribute to minimising global warming and reduce climate change. They should take a pledge to avoid use of plastic

articles and purchase only necessary consumer goods. Periyar said that education given to women was education given to the whole family and nation. Women's role had been important in many fields and they could help in protecting environment.

SUGGESTIONS

Women can contribute to, they can participate in, and they can play their role in protection of the environment in many ways:

Replace Compact Fluorescent Light Bulb

Replace a regular incandescent bulb with compact fluorescent bulb CFLs use 60% less energy than a regular bulb. This simple switch will save about 300 pounds of carbon dioxide a year.

Clean and Replace Your Air Conditioner

Cleaning a dirty air filter can save 350 pounds of carbon dioxide per year.

Wrap Your Water Heater in an Insulation Blanket

You will save 1000 pounds of carbon dioxide per year with this simple action.

Move Your Refrigerator

Placing them next to cooker or boiler consumes much more energy than if they were standing on their own. For example, if you put them in a hot cellar room where the room temperature is 30-35c, energy use is almost double and causes an extra 160 kg of co2 emissions for fridges per year and 320 kg for freezers.

Defrost Old Fridge and Freezer Regularly

Even better is to replace them with newer models, which have automatic defrost cycles and are generally up to two times more energy-efficient than their predecessors

Do Not Let Heat Escape from Your House over a Long Period

When airing your house, open the windows only for a few minutes. If you open them all day long, the energy needed to keep it warm inside during six cold months would result in almost 1 ton of co2 emissions.

Cover Your Pots and Pans While Cooking

Doing so can save a lot of energy needed for preparing the dish. By using pressure cookers can reduce annual carbon dioxide emissions by at least 125 kg.

Reduce Usage of Gas

By reduce the usage of gas for cooking by just 20 minutes a day each household can reduce annual co2 emissions by 62 kg.

Use the Washing Machine Only When They Are Full

If you need to use the washing machine when it is half –loaded then use the half load settings, or economy setting. There is no need to set the temperature high. Nowadays detergents are so efficient that they get your clothes and dishes

clean at low temperatures.

Take a Shower Instead of Bath

A shower takes up to four times less energy than a bath which is cheap and provides the same comfort.

Be Sure You are Recycling at Home

You can save 2,400 pounds of carbon dioxide per year by recycling half of the waste your household generates.

Buy Intelligently

Buy recycled paper products: it takes less 70 to 90% less energy to make recycled paper and it prevents the loss of forest worldwide.

Reduce Waste

Most of the products we can buy because green house gas emissions in one or another way. During production and distribution-By taking your lunch in a reusable box instead of disposable one, you save the energy needed to produce new lunch boxes.

Plant a Tree

A single tree will absorb one ton of carbon dioxide over its lifetime. Shade provided by trees can also reduce your air conditioning bill by 10-15%. One tree produces nearly 120 kg of oxygen every year. A plant on your desk acts as a natural filter, absorbing airborne pollutants and computer radiation while replenishing oxygen levels.

Buy Locally Grown and Produced Foods

Buy locally will save fuel and keep money in your community.

Buy Fresh Foods Instead of Frozen

Frozen food uses 10 times more energy to produce.

Seek Out and Report Local Farmer Markets

They reduce the amount of energy to grow and transport the food to you by one fifth. Seek farmer's markets in your area, and purchase from there.

Cow- Methane Emitter

Methane is the most significant green house gas and cows are one of the greatest methane emitters. Their grassy diet and multiple stomachs help them to produce methane, which they exhale.

Reduce Drive

Reduce the number of miles you drive by walking, biking, carpooling or taking mass transit whenever possible. Reducing just 10 miles you driving every week would eliminate about 500 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per year. Don't use car or motorbike to travel short distances. Driving a short distance of 6 km in your car releases 1 kg of co2.

Maintain Your Car

Keep your car turned up regular maintenance helps improve fuel efficiency and reduce emissions. When just 1%

of car owners properly maintain their cars, nearly a billion pounds of carbon dioxide is kept out of atmosphere.

Don't Waste Fuel Driving with Gear

You can reduce carbon dioxide by reducing your driving style. Choose proper gears, do not abuse the gas pedal, use the engine break instead the pedal brake when possible and turn off your engine when your vehicle is motionless for more than one minute. By readjusting your driving style you can save money on both fuel and car maintenance.

Protect and Conserve Forest Worldwide

Forests play a critical role in global warming: they store carbon. When forests are burned or cut down, their stored carbon is released into the atmosphere- deforestation now accounts for about 20% of carbon dioxide emissions every year.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper had discussed the various ways women have participated actively in environmental protection and natural resource management in order to ensure sustainable use of environmental resources. Women shared the environment as much as the men share. Involving women in protecting the environment would help societies develop the sense of responsibility needed to maintain a good balance between human and earth resources. Balanced and equal participation of men and women in formulating and implementing policies and programmes was essential, said Salvano Briceno, Director of United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

Women should be allowed to participate at the local, regional, national, and international levels on environmental issues. Women as bearers and conservers of life, as those who first guide children, should be foremost in dedication to the environmental cause. Environmental education is required for the every citizen for sustainable development. Educated women will contribute more significantly to bridging the gap between environment and development. Protect the environment to get clean water, air for respiration and clean soil for cultivation. These are required for safe and healthy life for present as well as future generation.

Ecological balance is an important aspect of new approach to nation's development, and women's concern with local ecological stakeholder ship is vital to women empowerment process.

The population pressure has increased male migration, which in turn adds to the load of work on women. Thus women's responsibilities extend from the household duties to working in the fields as well. Women play a key role in the protection of biological diversity through their varied responsibilities. They have identified the need not only to protect the bio-diversity, but also to recreate it. The Indian women were always ahead in the matter of prevention of pollution and protection, preservation, conservation, promotion and enhancement of the environment. They have made greater sacrifices, have exhibited greater love than man in the area of environment protection. The strong desire, devotion and dedication towards better environment made Indian women a crusader against environment pollution. It is important for us to ensure a healthy environment for our future generation - every drop of water that goes into the making of an ocean is important. Don't let our world to become "**Once upon a time**". One day we shall work for trees and advice people to adopt eco friendly habits. Small things when combined together can certainly lead to a bigger and better solution.

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